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COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

May 11, 2004

General Bruce Zukauskas
Deputy Commander
94th Regional Readiness Command
Fort Devens, MA 01433

Dear General Zukauskas:

We write to request formal answers to several important questions raised by families of three companies of the Army's 94th Readiness Command. As you know, members of the 94th Military Police Company (Londonderry, NH), 912th Forward Surgical Team (Worcester, MA) and 439th Quartermaster Company (New Haven, CT) have recently had their tours in the Iraq theater extended. Over the last month, you have held several "town hall" meetings with family members of these companies. While we appreciate these attempts to better inform reserve component dependents, we do not believe that these meetings have effectively answered many of the questions raised by these dependents and loved ones. Therefore, we respectfully request that you provide us with answers to these specific questions within the next two weeks.

We know that you share the pride we feel in the success that our Reserve component service members have achieved. However, this deployment has also taken a great toll on the families. While uncertainty and fear affect service members and their families in any deployment, the loved ones of the 94th Readiness Command companies and battalions have faced unusual burdens. Unlike families whose military member is on active duty, Reserve families often do not have access to the same facilities – from commissaries to mental health services – because they live far from the home installation. Similarly, the expectations that families have for deployment of Reservists are far different from those of active duty members.

Therefore, we would like to see you address a number of issues. We ask these questions because the communication between the Army and the families has faltered. The Army has done a poor job of explaining the need for continued deployment of these companies, and has not adequately explained the details of the extension, such as length and the tasks that will be performed. Instead, families are relying on direct communication from service members, which is sporadic and often based on rumor rather than fact. In some cases, families have learned important information from news media reports, rather than through the military command. We are anxious to hear your plans to improve communication.

We are particularly disappointed in the information available to family members on the 94th Readiness Command's website. The Internet could be a powerful force in providing dependents with information about services available to them while the service member is on active duty. Instead, this website is completely insufficient in all respects.

- 1.) The families of these companies and battalions have informed us that the family support service units at the reserve centers are insufficient. Most family members at the New Haven Reserve Center were unaware that family support staff was available until the meeting on April 26. Will you be taking steps to increase the responsiveness reserve centers that comprise the 94th Readiness Command?
- 2.) Most families seemed unaware of "Operation Uplink" and other programs that provide free or reduced-rate calling cards to service members deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We are also concerned that similar conditions may exist for other worthwhile programs, such as "Operation Hero Miles." What is the Readiness Command doing to ensure that Reserve component dependents are aware of these and similar resources that will can save money for these families?
- 3.) The prolonged deployment of these families will obviously impact many long-planned events or accommodations made to meet the previous deployment schedule. Will leave be granted to members of the 94th Readiness Command's companies and battalions for reasons other than emergency?
- 4.) What psychiatric services will be available to service members and their families when the troops return? As you well know, re-entry into civilian life is an extremely difficult emotional process for Reserve component service members and their dependents. It is critical that these men and women receive the help that they deserve.

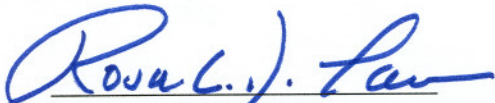
These concerns affect the families of the 94th Readiness Command, whose members hail from throughout New England and New York. However, we believe that they also are representative of other Army Reserve component and National Guard units. It is clear from the performance of Reservists and Guardsmen in Iraq and Afghanistan that they are an indispensable part of today's military. Unfortunately, the lack of certainty in scheduling, and the lack of effective communication between the Army and Reserve component families make such service less desirable. I fear that we will continue to see a decrease in re-enlistment in these vital units unless these issues are addressed.

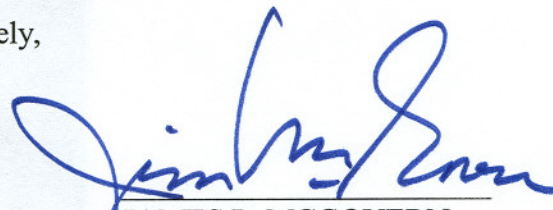
General Zukauskas
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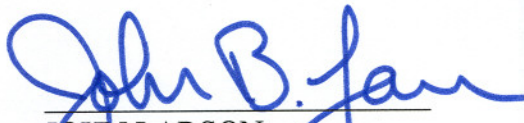
Given that members of the 94th Military Police Company (Londonderry, NH), 912th Forward Surgical Team (Worcester, MA) and the 439th Quartermaster Company (New Haven, CT) have had their tours extended through the summer, a response to these issues is extremely critical to provide peace of mind to our soldiers and their families.

Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to a reply within the next two weeks.


Sincerely,

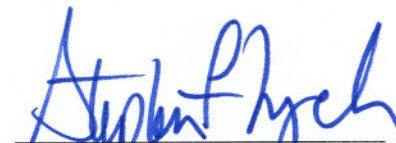

ROSA L. DELAURO
Member of Congress

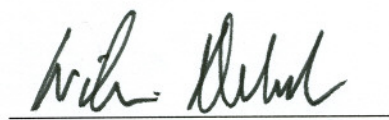

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